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## EVERYTHING YOU OWN, OWNS YOU BACK! (SO ACQUIRE WITH CARE!)



*A modern-day Gulliver, strapped down by his belongings*

Recently we sold a summer home that we had owned for more than 20 years. Located in rural northwestern Pennsylvania, where we grew up, it provided us with a yearly change of scenery and the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and family. The place was great for holding cook-outs and bonfires or just hanging out and watching birds, rabbits and deer cross the yard on their way to the hardwood forest out back.

After a few years this double-home lifestyle began to take an increasingly larger toll on our peace of mind. In the winter, while we were safe and warm in California, we worried about pipes bursting in the empty Pennsylvania house as temperatures plunged below zero and stayed there for days at a time. And spring thunderstorms (often

accompanied by hail or even tornadoes) posed their own threats to the place. To make sure everything was okay during these weather outbreaks we would have to ask relatives or a neighbor to brave the elements and check on the place.

And then there was that large, green lawn. Unless we returned very early in Spring, we'd have to make arrangements for it to be mowed and tended by those same volunteers. Eventually, of course, we'd arrive and whip that big yard into shape. But this typically took the better part of a full day every week we were there.

Over the years, our time in PA was increasingly spent on additional maintenance chores. The water from the well was brought into the house by a submersible pump that had to be repaired and eventually replaced. And the iron-saturated water, a legacy of groundwater contamination by local coal strip mining during the 1950s, had to be treated with strong chemicals in order to be usable. These chemicals, in turn, would become saturated themselves with iron, requiring monitoring. If you waited too long to replace them, you might find that your laundry, instead of becoming clean, had acquired a deep red-brown permanent stain.

Eventually an ancient natural gas well that supplied the house with gas for heating and cooking simply ran out of gas. So we had to arrange for the local gas company to install a brand new gas line to the place. (It had never had a "gas company" gas line!) What's more, those torrential rains that kept those beautiful hills green finally resulted in leaks in the roof and foundation that had to be repaired by specialists. And there were many other chores large and small that our ownership of the place had earned us.

After a few years of this split-home-base lifestyle, we started to realize that we were living in constant home maintenance mode, no matter where we were. Since each house stood exposed to the elements all year

long, each gradually developed issues that had to be urgently attended to during our part-time stays there. (We typically spent about 6 months in each place, while the other, empty place simply stood there baking in the sun or hunkered down in the wet or frozen precipitation.)

***Everything You Own Owns You Back!***

One day, as I was shopping for the supplies for still another home maintenance chore, I began to feel particularly weary of this maintenance-intense lifestyle. In fact, I felt downright claustrophobic! Trapped by all the stuff I owned! It was at that moment that I heard these words bubble up through my consciousness: ***“Everything you own, owns you back!”***

WOW!! What an epiphany! I shook my head in disgust and mumbled, “You can say that again, brother!” Every thing I owned was revealing its own maintenance demands. Everything — all those plumbing fixtures and walls and ceilings and heating units and roof shingles and rain gutters and electronics and appliances and gas lines and electric lines and landscaping elements — even the tools to do the fixing— all this stuff was consuming me with maintenance demands! ***Everything I owned absolutely owned me back!***

I felt like Gulliver on the beach in Lilliput. But instead of Lilliputians staking me to the sand, I was crushed by all these things, each with its little rope attached to me, nailing down my psyche and my time and my effort.

It was then that I experienced a huge shift in my consciousness. I could no longer count these things among my blessings. Instead, they had all become burdens. Discussing this with my wife, I discovered that she was feeling the same way. And before long we sold that second home in the country and experienced our first California winter in more than two decades absolutely free from the worry of freezing pipes back East.

And this was followed by a CA spring and summer that were free of the fear of Eastern thunderstorms and tornadoes and undone maintenance chores. *We were free!*

***The Lesson Learned: Acquire with Care!***

Two decades of split-home living taught me a lesson I now know deep in my bones: I absolutely must be conscious of everything I acquire, as I acquire it, since everything has the potential to extend its tentacles deep into my peace of mind and suck the life out of my life!

Think about it: If you're a responsible adult, you honor your commitments whether they are to simply maintain the stuff you own or follow through with a new process you've just set up and agreed to use. Some examples: You have a car, you take it in for maintenance, check the oil regularly, make sure you have enough gas to get where you need to go. You have a lawn, you mow it, edge it, maybe even weed it once in a while. You have a dog, you walk it and pick up its waste. You tell your team you'll do weekly project status reports, you do your best to prepare and distribute them, even when you don't feel like it. You commit to a Project Post Mortem, you take the time to organize it and execute it and prepare that Lessons Learned report, even though everyone is thoroughly sick of the project and just wants to move on!

The point is that **responsible adults feel the pull of commitment from everything they own, everyone they agree to serve and every process or tool they agree to use.** All these things acquire "mind share" and a certain amount of effort in maintenance. In short, **the relationship with any acquisition is reciprocal! It may give you something, but you will be giving something in return,** even if it's just a little of your peace of mind.

So the next time you are about to buy something or commit to use a new

process or develop a new business relationship with someone, step back and **ask these four questions:**

1. What is the purpose of this?
2. How much effort will it take to maintain?
3. Is this worthwhile? (Will there be a large enough return?)
4. How much energy will this pull from my creativity, my peace of mind, my family and the quality of my other efforts?

Think carefully about your answers to these questions.

Then commit to your acquisition cautiously. After all, **ultimately everything you own owns you back!**

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